

Democratic Republic of Congo

More a geographical concept than a fully fledged nation, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre) is a bubbling cauldron of untamed wilderness carpeted by swathes of rainforest and punctuated by gushing rivers and smoking volcanoes. Rendered almost ungovernable by the central administration in Kinshasa, the country remains closed to all but the most brave-hearted travellers. The nation's history reads like something out of Dante's *Inferno* – from the brazen political folly of King Leopold of Belgium to the hideously corrupt 'kleptocracy' of maverick megalomaniac Mobutu Sese Seko, and the blood-stained battlegrounds of Africa's first 'world war'.

The DRC isn't all failed politics and wasted natural resources, however. Somewhere in the midst of this proverbial heart of darkness lies a lumbering African giant. With groundbreaking national elections in July 2006 giving voice to 60 million shell-shocked inhabitants, a corner may have been turned. Despite early post-election violence in Kinshasa, incumbent president Joseph Kabila took office in October 2006 under the watchful eye of the world's largest UN peacekeeping force. In some senses, the future can only get better. With five Unesco biospheres, whole ecosystems of teeming wildlife and an estimated US\$24 trillion of untapped mineral capacity lying underneath the ground, it goes without saying that the country's potential is breathtaking.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 2,345,410 sq km
- **ATMs** none
- **Borders** Congo is open as are borders with Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. The Angolan border is also open. Tanzania, Sudan and CAR are closed. Zambia is normally open.
- **Budget** US\$80 to US\$100 a day
- **Capital** Kinshasa
- **Languages** French, Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo, Tshiluba
- **Money** Congolese franc; US\$1 = CDF432
- **Population** 62.6 million
- **Seasons** North of equator: wet (April to October), dry (December to February); south of equator: wet (November to March), dry (April to October)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 243; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1 (west); GMT/UTC + 2 (east)
- **Visa** US\$75 for a single-entry, one-month visa; US\$140 for a 60-day, multiple-entry tourist visa



CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Apart from high-altitude areas, most of the country is hot and humid year-round, with daytime temperatures lingering around 30°C. Rainfall is scant near the coast, but increases significantly as you move inland.

The best time to go depends largely upon which area of the country you will be visiting. The dry season (and the best time to visit) in the north is from December and February while in the south it runs between April and October.

HISTORY

A Tragic Story

Packed with possibilities, but blighted by over 100 years of war, despotism and horror, the country now known as the DRC has suffered more than any other country on earth. The first stories to emerge from the steaming river basin that straddles the equator in this mysterious part of central Africa were brought home by Portuguese explorers in the 15th century. Trading goods such as ivory, cloth, pottery and ironware, they made contact with a highly developed kingdom known as the Kongo that was ruled over by a patriarchal monarch and stretched as far south as the Kwanza River in Angola.

Little more was heard of the Kongo until the 1860s, when Dr David Livingstone began opening up the African interior to European exploration. After the learned Scot went missing for more than five years in 1866, a New York newspaper sent out a precocious Welshman, Henry Morton Stanley, to track

WARNING!

The Democratic Republic of Congo is still prone to sporadic civil unrest and safety in many areas is not guaranteed. We were unable to do on-the-ground research, so some information in this chapter may not be reliable. Check the situation before travelling.

him down. The two expat Britons met on 10 November 10 1871 near modern-day Kigoma in Tanzania, but it was Stanley's subsequent African sojourns, under the sponsorship of the British *Daily Telegraph* newspaper to trace the course of the Congo River, that marked his own place in history.

Reported enthusiastically in *The Times*, Stanley's Congolese exploits were quickly seized upon by the most unlikely of colonial adventurers, King Leopold II of Belgium. Devious, greedy and wholly ignorant of African affairs, Leopold had been eyeing the unclaimed African gâteau for some time, but he was having some trouble persuading the Belgian government to go along with him. To solve the problem the arrogant monarch decided to acquire a colony in his own right. The resulting European furore became known as the 'Scramble for Africa'.

In 1878 Leopold summoned Stanley and commissioned him to go back to the Congo under the smoke screen of the International African Society – a supposed philanthropic organisation. Over the ensuing five years Stanley signed more than 400 treaties with Congo chiefs on Leopold's behalf, tricking them to hand over their land rights in return for paltry gifts. At the Berlin conference called by Bismarck in 1884 to carve up Africa, Leopold – aware of a German desire to offset French and British colonial interests – managed to convince the famous Iron Chancellor to declare the Congo a free trade area and cede it to him as his own personal fiefdom.

Leopold inherited a country 75 times the size of Belgium, and philanthropy was the last thing on his mind as he set about fleecing the Congo of its ivory, copper and – in the wake of the invention of the pneumatic tyre – rubber. Hideous crimes were committed against the Congolese by Leopold's rubber traders. These included raiding villages and taking women and children captive as an incentive for the men to bring back ever-greater sup-

HOW MUCH?

- **Internet per hour** US\$2 to US\$3
- **Cup of coffee** US\$1.50
- **Car hire per day** US\$39
- **Bottle of wine** US\$15 to US\$20
- **Average main meal** US\$12 to US\$15

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.75
- **1L bottled water** US\$1.50
- **500ml bottle of Primus beer** US\$2
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$10 to US\$15
- **Breakfast** US\$5

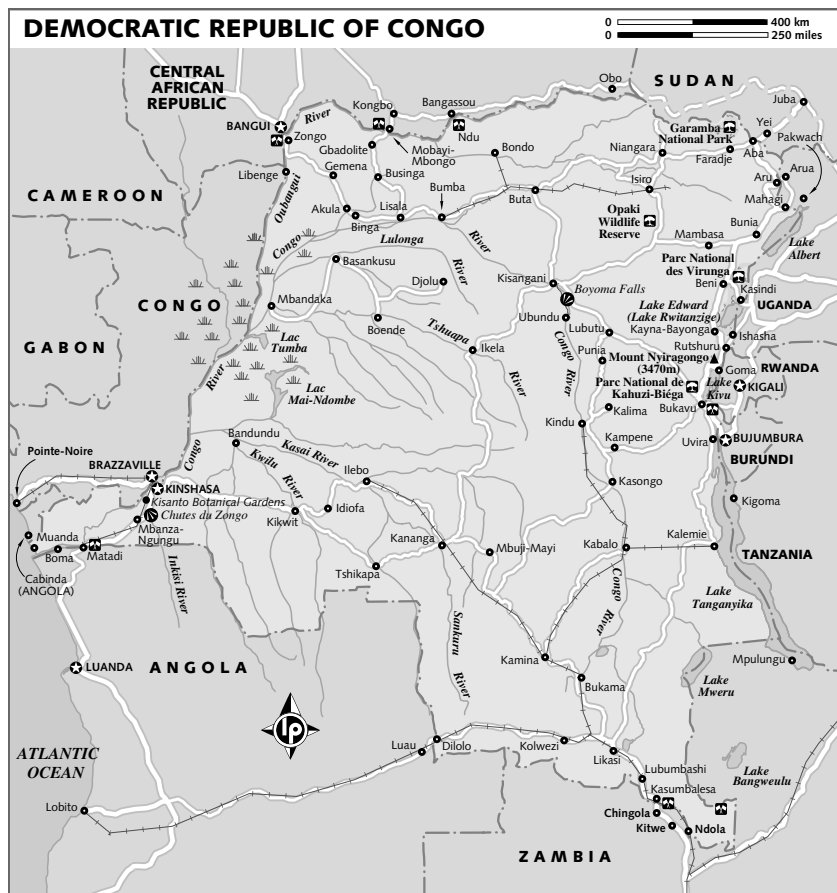
plies of rubber from the forest. Those who did not return their quota had their hands chopped off. And all the while, in one of the earliest examples of cynical political spin-doctoring, Leopold passed off his Congo venture as a shining example of fine governorship and benevolence, aimed at 'civilising the Negroes' and keeping the 'cruel Arab slave-traders' at bay.

Independence

As Leopold's crimes gradually became public knowledge, the Belgian government realised enough was enough, and paid the unscrupulous king US\$4 million in compensation to annex the land mass now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo themselves.

Thereafter, things took a turn for the better. The new Belgian administration built clinics, schools and roads, and eradicated sleeping sickness. By the 1940s the Congo was Africa's richest country, though the local people still had few political rights and the Belgian government proved consistently negligent in preparing the Congolese for a smooth handover at independence.

Gathering pace in the 1950s under charismatic revolutionary Patrice Lumumba, the independence movement finally wrested control from the colonisers in 1960. As the Congolese struggled to form a coherent government, the Belgians – who had left the country with only 16 qualified university graduates – quickly realised their mistake and, with covert US



support, re-intervened in the Congo in order to stem the mounting chaos, backing a plot by army chief Joseph Désiré Mobutu to oust (and assassinate) Lumumba, who was moving suspiciously towards the Soviet Union.

Renaming himself Mobutu Sese Seko, and the country Zaïre, the new leader embarked on a campaign of 'Africanisation', with people dropping their Christian names, and suits giving way to the *abacost* (a Congolese version of the Mao jacket); though Mobutu himself was far from being a communist, allying the country firmly in the US camp.

Proving himself to be even more incompetent than Leopold, Mobutu duly turned corruption and the squandering of state resources into an art form. Toting up more than US\$2 billion in US loans over a 30-year period and printing money as if it was going out of fashion, he became legendary for his Marquis de Sade-style extravagance, stuffing more than US\$5 billion into Swiss bank accounts and hiring Concorde to take him on shopping trips to the Champs Élysées. Indeed, so rife was his administration with conniving and nepotism that writer Michela Wrong invented a new word to describe his spectacular style of state mismanagement: kleptocracy

Civil War

With a sea of political change rippling across the world in the early 1990s, Mobutu finally got his comeuppance. Backing the Hutu perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, he enraged Zairan Tutsis, who, supported enthusiastically by Rwandan and Ugandan troops, marched on Kinshasa in May 1996. Mobutu narrowly escaped capture by hitching a lift on a cargo plane to Togo and died four months later of cancer in Morocco.

The new leader, Laurent Kabila – a one-time confidante of Che Guevara – dashed any hopes early on by outlawing political opposition and renaming the country (with no apparent irony) the Democratic Republic of Congo. Proving himself every bit as corrupt as Mobutu, Kabila took the madness a stage further by plunging the country into civil war, setting his government against the very Tutsis he had once claimed to represent. The conflict broadened when Rwanda and Uganda entered on the side of the Tutsi rebels and Kabila was only saved when Angola and Zimbabwe waded in with military support for the Congolese government.

The DRC's second war started in 1998 and culminated with the assassination of Laurent Kabila in January 2001 by one of his own bodyguards. Succeeded by his son Joseph, Kabila the younger couldn't have been more different than his incompetent father. English-speaking, Western-educated and only 29 years old when he took power, Kabila II quickly set about presiding over a peace treaty between the warring African factions that in 2002 paved the way for an all-party transitional government. Notwithstanding, the challenges facing the country are still huge. By 2003 the war had claimed more than 3.8 million lives and displaced another 3.4 million people, but with the establishment of the DRC's second ever multiparty elections in July 2006 many hoped that a corner had been turned.

DRC Today

Or had it? The 2006 elections caused a stalemate between incumbent Joseph Kabila and opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba, with sporadic violence breaking out, particularly in Kinshasa. Kabila won the second round of the election in October 2006 with a landslide in the Swahili-speaking east. Meanwhile, co-cooned in-country, 17,000 UN soldiers (the world's largest peacekeeping force) continue to oversee a shaky and volatile security situation. For experienced Africa-watchers, the DRC's future looks as uncertain as ever.

PEOPLE

As complex racially as it is politically, the DRC plays host to more than 250 individual ethnic groups and more than 700 different languages and dialects. Not surprisingly it is the Kongo tribe that dominates, closely followed by the Luba and Mongo groupings that collectively make up more than 40% of the population.

Despite widespread animist beliefs approximately 80% of the population are either Protestants or Roman Catholics. A popular minority sect is manifested in Kimbanguism, a Christian cult that developed around the mysterious figure of Simon Kimbangu in the 1920s and '30s. Kimbanguism remains Africa's most popular form of 'indigenous' Christianity.

ENVIRONMENT

The DRC is the third-largest country in Africa, much of which is covered by impenetrable rainforest, and crisscrossed by huge

rivers such as the Congo, Kasai and Oubangui, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean. The forests are home to all manner of primates, including bonobo (or pygmy chimps – humans' closest relatives). The country includes the greater part of the Congo River basin, which covers almost one million sq km. To the east, the DRC's borders run the length of the Rift Valley, opening up to the spectacular lakes of Albert (Mobutu), Edward (Rwanzige), Kivu, Tanganyika and Mweru, while mountains such as the Ruwensori range on the country's eastern border approach the 5000m mark. The DRC is also home to volcanoes; Mt Nyiragongo near Goma caused devastation when it erupted in 2002, covering much of the town in molten rock. There are vast, beautiful nature reserves in the DRC, although most of them (including Kahuzi-Biéga and Virunga) are in the east, still patrolled by warring militias.

KINSHASA

pop 6.7 million

Once touted as Kin la belle (beautiful Kinshasa), the 21st-century incarnation of the chaotic capital of the DRC is regrettably anything but. Huge, sprawling, grimy and confusing, the city – which, with over six million inhabitants, is Africa's third largest (after Lagos and Cairo) – is a long way from being a traveller's haven, though with multiparty elections ushering in a new era of hope and reintegration this situation could soon change.

Built up on the banks of the Congo River and infested with shabby shantytowns and myriad opportunist merchants masquerading as street salesmen, this polluted megapolopolis couldn't be called pretty by anyone. That said, there are a number of surprisingly deserted areas where exhausted visitors can escape from the traditional mayhem, such as the once-grand (and now run-down) colonial neighbourhood, or the city centre on a Sunday.

Kinshasa's general decrepitude and abundance of buildings in eternal stages of half-completion are as much to do with incapable government as they are to do with the ravages of war – the DRC's various administrations have generally been too preoccupied in trying to keep control of the country to actually

develop it. But Kinshasa could be worth a brief if tentative visit by the brave and well-travelled explorer armed with a close eye on security and a true sense of African adventure. Think less of historic monuments and broad tree-lined avenues and more of traditional handicrafts, bustling markets and a vibrant nightlife that pulsates to the unique rhythms of soukous.

ORIENTATION

N'djili international airport is 25km south-east of the city. Minibuses run to the city centre, but they are overcrowded, badly maintained and downright unsafe on the lawless, potholed roads. Opt instead for an unmarked taxi (US\$10) or arrange for someone to pick you up. The city centre branches off from the banks of the Congo River, looking directly across at Brazzaville on the other side. The diplomatic district of Gombé lines the riverbank with great views of floating water hyacinths and the skyline of Brazzaville.

INFORMATION

Cash is king in Kinshasa, with travellers cheques and credit cards virtually useless. US dollars are invariably preferred over Congolese francs, but they'll only be accepted if they're in good (or even mint) condition. You can change money at one of Kinshasa's banks or with black marketeers along the waterfront.

Public phones consist of street hawkers who will let you use their mobile phones for a fee. Best stick to the top-end hotels where international calls are easy to arrange.

Centre Privé d'Urgences (☎ 20 875; Ave du Commerce) The best equipped of the emergency health centres in Kinshasa.

Cybergd (☎ 9903313; Ave Mobutu 18b, Masina; per hr US\$3) Internet access.

Cyberlogic (☎ 12 205 20; A11 Av Presse, Immeuble Moanda; per hr US\$3) Internet access.

ICARE (☎ 8807608; Rwindi Bldg, Blvd 30 Juin) This travel agency has extremely helpful staff.

Maison de France (Hal de la Gombé) There are several 24-hour pharmacies; this is the most central.

Ministry of Tourism (Ave Batetela, Gombé)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

If you are prepared to withstand lots of hassle and calls of '*mondele*' ('white person'), head to the **Central Market of Matongé** for lots of local

colour. Alternatively, the tourist market at **Marché de Valeur** (Pl de la Gare, Blvd 30 Juin) is great for everything from Congolese fabrics and masks to drums. Pay a third of the asking price tops, and keep an eye on your cash; it's locally known as *Marché du Voleur* (Thief's Market). **Academy des Beaux-Arts** (Blvd 24 Novembre, Gombé) has beautiful gardens to stroll around and souvenirs of genuinely fine craftsmanship to buy in a more relaxed setting.

Also worth seeing is the tomb of former president Laurent Kabila, the statue of national icon Patrice Lumumba, and the Gare Central.

SLEEPING

Kinshasa is expensive, and real budget accommodation is hard to come by, though there are a few central and secure options.

Hotel Estoril (☎ 8989 12210; Av Kabasele No 85; r US\$50; ☹) A cheap central option. Breakfast here is an extra US\$5.

Hotel Pyramide (☎ 81-508 95 56; Av Nguma No 35; r US\$125; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) This is a small luxury hotel located about 5km from the centre of Kinshasa. All rooms here have bathrooms with a Jacuzzi and hot water. There is a swimming pool, internet facility and a restaurant selling main meals from between US\$7 and US\$10.

Hotel Memling (☎ 81-700 63 64, 81-700 11 11; Av De la Republique du Tchad No 5; r US\$130; ☹ ☹) Kinshasa's flagship hotel was once owned by former Belgian national airline company Sabena, and though some of the fittings are showing signs of age, the setting is generally safe, and the surroundings relatively salubrious. There are also good reports on the food.

EATING

Streetside vendors selling barbecued goat and manioc abound in Kinshasa and are your best bet for cheap eating.

La Chaumiere (☎ 99 99 33 721; Av Ngongo Lutete; mains US\$20; ☹ 8:30am-11pm) This place serves Western and Congolese dishes.

Pili Burger (☎ 982 80270; Blvd du 30 Juin No 120a) This place offers 10 different varieties of burger/sandwich.

ENTERTAINMENT

Dancing and drinking beer pretty well cover the entertainment options in Kinshasa, although jazz and rumba can be found at some venues.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are flights to Kinshasa direct from France (Paris) and a huge array of African cities (see p566), and you can cross by ferry between Kinshasa and Brazzaville (Congo), across the Congo River (see p558). Travelling overland, particularly from Uganda or Rwanda, is volatile. Check with your embassy first.

GETTING AROUND

There are no official taxis in Kinshasa, but you can hire unmarked taxis, known as 'taxi express', which tout for business outside the **Gallerie Présidentielle** (Blvd 30 Juin, Gombé). They cost from US\$30 per day with driver. Alternatively, at much higher rates (from US\$75 per day), you can hire cars from **Avis** (☎ 81-81 0111; Ave Batetela, Gombé; ☹ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) at the Intercontinental Hotel.

AROUND KINSHASA

A must-see while in Kinshasa is the **Chutes de Lukia**, 40 minutes by car or taxi from the centre of town, along the Matadi road. There is a decent restaurant, natural lakes to swim in and a bonobo orphanage, where you can play with the younger chimps. Beware if you are allergic to white 4WDs and walkie-talkies – it's a favourite haunt of resident UN and aid worker staff at weekends.

The fish market at **Kinkole**, 32km out of Kinshasa along the road to the airport, is worth a visit. The market was constructed by Mobutu to honour the country's fishermen as part of his 'authenticity' campaign. You can hire a pirogue for US\$10 an hour and be paddled down the Congo River, drink intoxicating palm wine on the riverbank and try some of the country's best *liboke* (fish stewed in manioc leaves).

The **botanical gardens** of Kisanto are a 50km drive south of Kinshasa along the Matadi road, or you can take the train. With a collection of 100-year-old trees from all over the world, and gentle rivers in which to swim, Kisanto is definitely worth a visit.

For an overnight stay, press on another two hours to the **Chutes du Zongo**, a nature reserve with waterfalls for swimming, and basic chalets with attached bucket-and-drain bathrooms. Take your own food to barbecue. Book via the **Ministry of Tourism** (Ave Batetela, Gombé).

AROUND DRC

GOMA

A one-time stopover for overlanders to and from Rwanda, Goma is now a base camp for UN aid agencies trying to deal with the dual catastrophes of the 2002 Mt Nyiragongo volcanic eruption and the ongoing Rwandan refugee crisis. The one reason to visit Goma these days (and you would be wise to check up-to-date travel warnings first) is as a transit town on the way to Parc National Des Virungas, home of the famous mountain gorillas and the world's second-oldest national park (after Yellowstone).

KISANGANI

A major city on the middle reaches of the Congo River, Kisangani was known in colonial times as Stanleyville and was immortalised as the unnamed city in VS Naipul's classic novel *A Bend in the River*. Once a fairly pleasant place and a major hub for travellers, the decaying Belgian colonial buildings have seen far better days. Attractions in the area include Boyoma Falls (the world's highest volume waterfall), and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, a Unesco World Heritage Site.

LUBUMBASHI

In the heart of the copper belt, and largely detached from the rest of the DRC, Lubumbashi is a compact city of one million inhabitants that boasts pleasant gardens, well-kept homes and a reasonable network of dirt roads. The local mines are worth a fleeting visit.

DRC DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

For the time being cheap accommodation in the DRC is limited. If you are new to the country and are not travelling with a group or official organisation, it is probably better – and safer – to start off staying in one of the handful of international hotels (where you can pre-book a room) and take it from there.

BUSINESS HOURS

Businesses are usually open 8.30am to 3pm Monday to Friday and 8.30am to noon on Saturday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Avoid taking photos in public, especially of the river, government buildings and the airport, which are viewed as places of national security. Taking unsanctioned photos can lead to arrest.

Do not walk around at night and think twice about walking around in the daytime unless you are sure of the route. Take the advice of the locals in matters of personal security wherever possible. If you are involved in a car accident do not hang around as mobs can gather quickly. Always carry a copy of your passport.

Malaria remains rife throughout DRC. Check with your GP before leaving home and take all the necessary precautions (see p1134 for further information).

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

DRC Embassies & Consulates

Many of the country's embassies were closed down during 2003, but are likely to reopen. DRC has diplomatic representation in the following countries:

Angola (☎ 222-310293; Rua Fernando Pessoa, Vila Alice, Luanda)

Belgium (☎ 02 21 349 80; Rue Marie de Bourgogne 30 1040 Etterbeek, Brussels)

Congo (☎ 81 3052; Ave de l'Indépendance, Brazzaville)

France (☎ 01 42 42 25 57 50; 32 Cours Albert 1er, 75008, Paris)

UK (☎ 020-7278 9825; 281 Grays Inn Rd, London, WC1 X8QF)

USA (☎ 202-234 7690/1; 1726 M St, Suite 601, NW Washington, DC 20036)

PRACTICALITIES

- The Democratic Republic of Congo's newspapers are the dailies *Debout Congolais* and *La Référence*.
- Radio Okapi is the national station. The main TV channel is Radio-Television Nationale Congolaise (RTNC) – state-controlled terrestrial and satellite TV.
- Electricity is 220V 50Hz. There are two plug shapes: a European plug with two circular metal pins; and a South African/Indian-style plug with two circular metal pins above a large circular grounding pin.
- The DRC uses the metric system.

Embassies & Consulates in DRC

The following countries have diplomatic representation in Kinshasa.

Belgium (☎ 89 24 233; Pl du 27 Octobre)

Canada (☎ 895 0310; Ave Pumbu 17, Gombé)

Central African Republic (☎ 33 571; Ave Pumbu 11, Gombé)

Congo (☎ 34 028; Blvd du 30 Juin 179, Brazzaville)

France (☎ 81 700 7213; Ave République du Tchad 97)

Germany (☎ 894 8201; Ave de Roi Baudouin 82)

Kenya (☎ 37 23 641; Ave de Louganda 4002)

UK (☎ 98 169 100; Ave de Roi Baudouin 83, Gombé)

USA (☎ 81 225 5872; 310 Ave des Aviateurs)

Zambia (☎ 21 802; Ave de L'Ecole 54)

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays are as follows:

New Year's Day 1 January

Martyrs of Independence Day 4 January

National Heroes Day 17 January

Easter Monday March/April (dates vary)

Labour Day 1 May

National Liberation Day 17 May

Independence Day 30 June

All Saints Day 1 November

Army Day 17 November

New Regime Anniversary 24 November

Christmas Day 25 December

MONEY

The local currency is the Congolese franc (CDF); it cannot be converted and cannot be taken out of the country. With individual note denominations nearly worthless it is often easier to use US dollars, though you should be careful not to use old dollar bills or small denominations (anything below a US\$20 note).

Travellers cheques and credit cards are rarely accepted here; credit cards are only accepted in one or two upmarket hotels in Kinshasa. Your best bet is to travel with a carefully concealed money belt containing US dollars.

You can change money around the port, but it's better to find a reliable contact (ask around where you are staying).

POST & TELEPHONE

The postal system ranges from unreliable to nonexistent.

Make calls from internet centres or hotels. This is expensive, but land lines are rare. For local calls you might be able to borrow someone's mobile.

TOURS

Go Congo (☎ 98 36 82 00; www.gocongo.com) is second to none when it comes to arranging trips in-country. The Kinshasa-based operation offers a selection of tailored trips as well as services for individual travellers such as hotel reservations, transfers and guides. Another option is the British-based **Undiscovered Destinations** (☎ in the UK 191 2064038; www.undiscovered-destinations.com).

VISAS

All visitors need a visa. If flying into Kinshasa it is essential to get a visa beforehand. These cost approximately US\$75 for a one-month, single-entry visa, or US\$135 for a 60-day, multiple-entry tourist visa. If crossing by land you can often get a visa at the border within 24 hours.

Visas for Onward Travel

If at all possible, procure your onward travel African visas from your home country before departure. This is especially true for Angolan visas which require a letter of introduction from a person in-country first. The easiest visa to get in the DRC is for Congo (Brazzaville) a short hop across the Congo River.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Exercise extreme caution if you are a female traveller. Do not drive alone after dark; instead drive in a convoy, if you can. Be very wary of the armed forces: rape has been used extensively as a weapon of war.

TRANSPORT IN DRC

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air France is the only airline with direct flights into Kinshasa (it flies from Paris to Kinshasa once or twice a week). KLM flies from Amsterdam to Kinshasa via Nairobi once or twice a week, and SN Brussels Airlines flies from Brussels to Kinshasa, usually via Douala, three times a week. Bravo Air Congo flies out of Kinshasa three times a week to Brussels and Paris, with one of the weekly Paris flights connecting to Madrid.

From within Africa, South African Airways flies between Kinshasa and Johannesburg about three times a week, and Ethiopian Airlines flies between Kinshasa and Addis Ababa around three times a week; you can also fly in from Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Bujumbura

(Burundi), Douala (Cameroon), Lagos (Nigeria), Luanda (Angola), Libreville (Gabon) and Nairobi (Kenya). Although planes now fly from Kinshasa to the east of DRC, the east is more easily accessed via Kigali in Rwanda.

Most airlines have offices at Kinshasa's N'djili Airport. Carriers include **Kenya Airways** (☎ 1221465; Hotel Memling, Ave Tchad, Gombé) and **SN Brussels Airlines** (☎ 081-897 5003; Blvd 30 Juin, Gombé). In Gombé, Kinshasa, you can contact **Air France** (☎ 081-884 5548; Hotel Memling, Ave Tchad, Gombé; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Sat) and **South African Airways** (☎ 081-700 5908; 6147, Blvd 30 Juin, Gombé).

A regular ferry links Kinshasa with Brazzaville in Congo. It costs US\$25 (see page p558).

Technically, you can catch a train from Lubumbashi to Johannesburg or Dar es Salaam but, due to railway underinvestment, schedules aren't reliable. Entry by plane is invariably a better bet.

The land border with Angola is open via the town of Matadi but crossing here is rarely attempted by foreigners and you could be faced with reams of bureaucracy and a whole lot of hassle (make sure you have pre-arranged your Angolan visa). Unless you're a truly intrepid overlander avoid at all costs.

GETTING AROUND

With only 480km of paved roads, flying is the best (and often the only) way of getting around the DRC, although the poor safety record of Congolese air traffic has led all but one (Bravo Air Congo) of its airlines to be banned from operating in Europe. Domestic airlines include Hewa Bora Airways, Congo Airlines and Lignes Aeriennes Congolaises, all with offices at the airport or you can book through travel agents.

Train travel is possible from Kinshasa to Matadi, Lubumbashi to Ilebo and Kalemie via Kabalo. There is an isolated branch of the Great Lakes railway line that runs between Kisangani and Ubundu in order to bypass the Boyoma (Stanley) Falls on the Congo River, but trains here are sporadic and there are no connections through to Kindu.

If you have enough time and aren't fussy about privacy there are possibilities to travel by barge along the Congo River from Kinshasa to Kisangani. This is the real highway of Central Africa and a wonderful way to see the country. However, there is no fixed timetable for the departure of barges and they often break down or get stuck on sandbanks along the way.